

Local pianist performs in Japan

By Corinne Abatt
staff writer

"Yes, there really is a Mr. Suzuki and I met him," said Fontaine Laing, Birmingham pianist who recently returned from three weeks in Japan with her husband, Robert.

She had accepted an invitation to give several concerts in Japan with Laura Larson, flutist, who is heading the Suzuki flute program at CCS — Institute of Music and Dance. Larson has been in Japan for a year studying with Suzuki at the Talent Education Institute in Matsumoto where she will graduate this June.

Laing accompanied Larson for one concert at the Institute, and they gave another concert in Toyota where they performed separately and together. The children from the Toyota class of the Institute, 28 students studying violin and cello, performed on the same program.

"Toyota is a sister city with Detroit, and they treated us royally. We (Detroit) gave them a tiger so they took us to the zoo to see (his) two tiger cubs. They had given Detroit a thousand cherry trees and they asked if I knew where they were, but I didn't know. We were there at cherry blossom time," she said.

During the cherry festival thousands of people bring their blankets, spread them under the trees, bring their saki and other refreshments and enjoy the beauty of the blossoms.

The Laings went to Japan with an Elder Hostel group and stayed with a Japanese family for almost a week as part of that program. On their home visit, they slept Japanese style on a mat, which is rolled up during the day and a pillow stuffed with bran.



Fontaine Laing

"I thought they were quite comfortable," she said, explaining that the pillows support the neck and head better than softer ones.

While her husband was traveling with the Elder Hostel group, she spent several days with Larson and paid her first visit to an ofuro, public bath.

Her observations on this and many other experiences of her trip are insightful. She noted for

example that people don't look at others undressed in the public bath, that would be impolite.

"Nobody has a lot of time," she said, "The kids leave at 7 in the morning and may not get home from school until evening," noting that adults, too, work long hours. "Mr. Suzuki, 88, gets up at 3 a.m., does calligraphy and then puts in a full day's work at the school."

Since six years of English (with a concentration on reading and writing) is required in Japanese schools, she wasn't totally surprised to find that all of the people in a retirement community knew songs such as "Old Folks at Home" and "Oh Susanna" when she played for them.

Wherever she and Larson performed, they were given many bouquets of flowers before and after the concert.

"Even people from the audience came up to us with flowers," she said.

One question popped up immediately, "The first thing they ask you is your age." But, she said, it isn't to be impolite, but rather to determine how they should address you because different ages require different forms of address.

Laing and Larson will both be teaching at the Institute of Music and Dance this fall. It was Detroit Community Music School before becoming a part of Center for Creative Studies. Laing also gives private lessons and performs. In the fall she will be playing with the Troy Orchestra and for the Michigan Music Teachers convention. She has performed as orchestra pianist with the Detroit Symphony, is a member of Birmingham Musicals and Tuesday Musicals.

She and Larson performed "Winter Moods," a composition by metropolitan area composer, Martin Scott Kosins, at their concert in Toyota.

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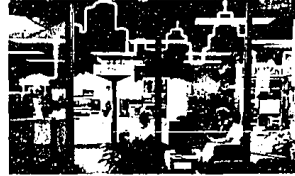
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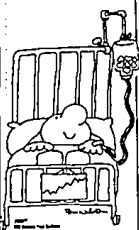
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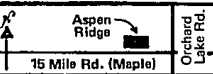
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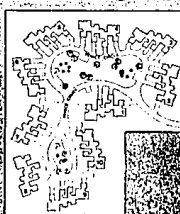


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